



# LOST IN TRANSLATION

The Misinformed Journey  
of Migrants Across Italy

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# Acronyms

CARA	Centre for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
CAS	Emergency Accommodation Centre
CwC	Communicating with Communities
IOM	International Organization of Migration
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SPRAR	Protection System of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

# Definitions

**Migrant:** Throughout this report, the term “migrant” is used as a shorthand to cover both refugee and other migrants arriving or residing in Italy. While the term “refugee” covers those fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution for specific reasons defined in international law, the term “migrant” covers a broader population. The latter may not fall within or be held to qualify for the protections afforded by the “refugee” category, but nevertheless often requires protection and urgent humanitarian attention. The people interviewed over the course of this assessment and defined here as migrants in fact fall under a wide variety of definitions: some of them are asylum seekers; some are economic migrants; some are people that have requested humanitarian protection; some have been already given the “Foglio di Via” which states that must leave Italy because their request was denied, but they nonetheless remain in the country. Our use of the term “migrant” is without prejudice to the question of whether a particular individual or group fall within the refugee definition.

**Minor:** A child means any person under the age of 18, unless under the (national) law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (Convention on the Rights of the Child, or CRC, Article 1). Separated children are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

**Hotspots:** Hotspots are centers set up to quickly identify, capture, capture and collect fingerprints of migrants, and are created to support the countries most exposed to new arrivals (in Italy and Greece). Migrants are detained in hotspots (which in many cases will be born in existing and equipped centers) until the end of all identification operations, after which they are usually sent to a more stable site (in the case of Italy for example, either a CARA, a CAS or a SPRAR).<sup>1</sup>

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1 <http://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HOTSPOTS-Report-5.12.2016..pdf>

## 01

## INTRODUCTION

Despite deterrence measures undertaken by European and Italian authorities, mainly through official or informal agreements with countries of origin or transit, migrant arrivals in Italy are estimated to continue in high numbers in 2017. According to IOM statistics, there were 36,703 arrivals to Italy by sea between 1st January and 31st April 2017.<sup>2</sup> Arrivals of migrants to Italy had reached an all-time high already in 2016, with 181,436 migrants disembarking on Italian shores, up from 153,842 in 2015. The uptick is attributed to the substantial decline in migration flows via the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece after the 20 March 2016 implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, the objective of which was the return of all irregular migrants to Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

As an example of how dynamic and diverse the population of migrants is, the Italian Ministry of Interior data shows that in 2017, Guinean nationals represent approximately 13% of migrants arriving to Italy by sea, followed by Nigerians (12%), Bangladeshis (11%), and persons from Ivory Coast (10%), Gambia (9%), and Senegal (8%). Adult migrants are overwhelming male, comprising 76% of the overall arrivals to Italy. Adult females represent 9%, unaccompanied minors 14%, and accompanied minors 1%. Those numbers show that any intervention to support migrants arriving in Italy should have an approach that is as equally dynamic as the diversity of the migrants arriving, and allows for an equally diverse response.

Italy is no stranger to receiving migrants, having been at the crux of migration patterns from the African continent to Europe for many years. The “Central Mediterranean Route,” through which migrants from North Africa (mostly Libya, then Egypt) reach Italy, has seen a sharp increase in activity since 2014, when arrivals shifted from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands.<sup>4</sup> While the Italian authorities, civil society, and humanitarian agencies operate on established response and reception frameworks, urgent gaps continue to surface, and the **critical need for information is at the heart of many shortcomings.**

2 <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-approach-43000-2017-deaths-962>

3 [http://migration.iom.int/docs/Monthly\\_Flows\\_Compilation\\_No4\\_11\\_April\\_2017.pdf](http://migration.iom.int/docs/Monthly_Flows_Compilation_No4_11_April_2017.pdf)

4 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53356>





Migrants traveling the perilous route through the Saharan desert and Libya do so with varying levels of connectivity and access to information, often relying completely on traffickers to facilitate the journey. The extent to which a person is informed about steps ahead and the journey at large often depends on his or her nationality and informal networks in destination countries in Europe. Passage through Libya exacerbates the risks and concerns present throughout the journey: with Libya being the point of departure for an overwhelming majority of Italy-bound migrants, the conditions and treatment endured by migrants cannot be underscored enough. Migrants reported prolonged imprisonment, torture, enslavement, and rape during their time in Libya. Once they arrive in the country, many say that cellphones are taken by traffickers or captors, and any attempts to access internet or other means of communication can be met with violent recourse.

Migrants take to the sea on overcrowded inflatable boats, or wooden boats ranging in size, with anywhere between 20-700 people on board. The death rate of those who take the Central Mediterranean route to reach Europe is staggering, with 4,579 perishing en route in 2016, and 898 deaths so far in 2017, as of 19 April 2017.<sup>5</sup>

The process of disembarkation from rescue vessels can be a chaotic experience, depending on the port of arrival, number of migrants on board, and available humanitarian capacity to support. Identification, processing, and first assistance of rescued migrants is done at one of four Hotspots in Italy (Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Trapani, Taranto), which have had systems in place since 2015.<sup>6</sup> It is at this high point of trauma, fatigue, and disorientation that incoming migrants also face decisions that will profoundly impact their futures, as they commence complex legal processes about which they have generally poor understanding or active misconceptions. This is

therefore a **crucial moment in which to provide them with useful, accurate information in languages and through mediums they understand, about the steps ahead.**

Based on their initial declaration of intent to seek asylum, migrants are moved to official reception facilities CAS (Emergency Accommodation Centre) and CARAs (Centre for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), which are managed by private entities, and supported by non-governmental organizations. Here they will await the processing of their asylum claims or applications for the EU Relocation or Family Reunification schemes. Many choose to leave these facilities, heading to Rome, Milan or border towns such as Ventimiglia or Como in attempts to cross to neighboring France or Switzerland. Such movement places them outside the formal asylum system and the protections it provides. Despite tightening border controls and increasing pushbacks from neighboring states, migrants persist in their desire to move elsewhere in Europe. Trust in the Italian system appears to wane at each juncture of their stay in the country – with perception of better accommodation, services, and faster processing of legal procedures in other European countries.

No matter the timeframe of their stay in Italy, or the purpose of their journeys, refugees and migrants demonstrate complex information needs about their ever-changing situation, which require a dynamic response with buy-in from all implicated stakeholders.

5 <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-approach-43000-2017-deaths-962>  
6 <http://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HOTSPOTS-Report-5.12.2016..pdf>

# 02

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“We work with migrants because we think that they don’t have enough information, and the thing that they need most is information. Many have no idea where they are. They need legal advice, they need to know what’s happening at the borders, what the different rules are in different countries, about relocation and asylum.”**

- BAOBAB Coordinator for informal site in Rome —”

In April 2017, an Internews team conducted a rapid assessment on information needs among refugees and migrants in Italy, visiting formal reception facilities (hotspot, CAS, CARA) in Lampedusa, Agrigento, Catania, and informal centers in Ventimiglia and Rome.

The numbers of people attempting to reach Italy from points in North Africa (namely, Libya) through extremely dangerous routes, as well as those who perish on the journey, are staggering. It is impossible to know how many deaths occur while traversing the African continent, or while in captivity in Libya. One migrant said, ominously, “for every 1,000 of us there are here (in Italy), 5,000 have died along the way.”

Before they board overcrowded wooden boats or dinghies destined for Italian shores, migrants report being tortured and held for ransom, arbitrary and prolonged detention, as well as brutal sexual abuse while they are in Libya. Their phones are taken, and they have **no means of accessing critical services or information.**

Migrants embark on a months-long (or more) journey without realizing how dire it is, or the brutality that awaits them in Libya. When asked if they would make the voyage again, knowing what they know now, an overwhelming number of migrants said that they would surely not. Countries of origin and transit are as critical to the information landscape as is Italy itself, and this is why finding an effective way to bring **narratives about the journey back to countries of origin** is a critical piece in the puzzle of the European migration crisis.





There is a framework in place for the provision of information to migrants once they arrive in Italy and go through the hotspot (rapid identification and registration) and formal reception system. While information provision for asylum-seekers being codified in Italian law is significant, the implementation of this mandate vastly depends on the site and actors involved. A **lack of standards and indicators for information provision** means that it is difficult to hold responsible authorities accountable, and that migrants may not be getting the information they need to make choices affecting their future.

Pamphlets containing legal information are distributed after migrants disembark and at reception facilities, but there is a need for engaging content for those who cannot read or cannot sufficiently understand the written language – this is especially the case for those migrants who have a rudimentary grasp of verbal English or French, but whose written comprehension is limited to dialect. Information sessions facilitated by humanitarian staff were found to be useful by migrants, but there is simply **not enough capacity to meet the information needs** of newly arrived migrants, especially at points of disembarkation, where there may be over one thousand people rescued.

As a result, the **absence of expertise and coordination in “Communicating with Communities” (CwC)** in the Italian migration response has had a negative impact on the quality of information provided to migrants, as well as what information is adequately retained.

The provision of information is not a one-size-fits-all service, which is why there needs to be significant effort made to establish a coordination mechanism for communication and engagement, set up feedback loops, and integrate the ever-changing information needs of migrants into programming. **Two-way communication** is a methodology that can easily be integrated into existing mechanisms, and it is the best way to assure a higher retaining capacity and understanding of the dense and complicated legal language.

Legal procedures relating to asylum – especially the pipeline for the EU relocation program – are slow, and are often conducted **without transparency**. While this is a question of policy, often on the European level, it results in what one NGO staff called a “fixation on papers” among migrants. When migrants are unclear about which actors are responsible for their fate, the lack of transparency foments distrust in all institutions involved in their reception, and that in turn undermines the migrants’ faith in the credibility of any information distributed by humanitarian organizations, Italian authorities, or managing entities of reception facilities.

One of the most prominent result of this lack of transparency is that **trust in institutions and authorities** seems to wane the further along migrants are in the asylum process, mainly due to their feeling “abandoned” or “forgotten” once the process starts, and because sometimes they are left waiting for months before they are given information about how their process is going.

The same applies to migrants outside of the system, who have already lost their trust in the possibility of receiving their papers and therefore decide to take their own path to Europe. This population has specific needs, especially those at border towns such as Ventimiglia or Como. However, when in transit, **migrants have a tendency to think that seeking help for a medical or protection concern might slow them down or enter them into the “system,”** in ways that might impede their chances of reaching their desired destination. In addition, many people are reluctant to engage at all because they are determined to cross the border, despite numerous pushbacks from the French or Swiss authorities, and the fact that borders are, effectively, closed.

The regional nature of constant refugee movement makes it crucial to undertake mapping of primary services and protection services across the region and ensure that CwC coordination also happens on a regional level to mitigate migrants’ vulnerability at every stage of their journey. **Ignoring the reality of onward movement is a mistake,** because the information component of the refugee crisis is a regional phenomenon, not Italy-specific. While some may see providing information about services outside of the formal system as potentially incentivizing onward movement, it should be considered that withholding this information has not had a demonstrable deterrent effect for migrants embarking on the journey to Europe.

**Local media has a critical role to play** in the larger information ecosystem. As much as the media in Italy have tended to exacerbate anti-immigrant sentiment in the country, the potential also exists for local media initiatives to facilitate meaningful engagement between migrants and the host community, deconstruct and debunk common myths about the migration crisis and contribute to integration efforts.

## INFORMATION NEEDS

**“They don’t know how to do the application for asylum. They know what relocation is, but they don’t know the steps to do the procedure. They don’t know how to go to the police.”**

- Italian lawyer working with migrants in Rome

### Connecting with family and friends back home

Many migrants have spent several months or even years on their journey to Europe, often without being able to communicate with loved ones. When they arrive at Hotspots after being rescued, a phone call or text message is sometimes the first sign of life they send back home after long periods of time. Being able to communicate with family and friends is vital for migrants, and is a lifeline during the lonely and stressful time as they wait for their cases to be processed. The majority of migrants receive three five-euro cards to call home. These last around 10 minutes in total, after which they may not receive additional cards for weeks.

### Understanding the process

When migrants arrive at reception facilities, whether they are staying in hotspots, temporary accommodations or longer-term centers, they naturally want to know where they are in relation to the overall process of applying for international protection, and what general timelines apply to their individual cases. The majority of the migrants interviewed during the assessment expressed frustration at not knowing the next step in their process. A lack of access to information, or a lack of understanding of the process, deprives migrants of a sense of control over their own lives and compounds the psycho-social trauma they may be experiencing.

### Legal procedures, duration and status updates

The complex process for applying for international protection and other legal procedures is a source of tremendous anxiety for migrants. Legal information is provided in formal reception centers, albeit in dense, academic language. However (understandably) migrants desperately seek more regular updates about the progress of their asylum claims. Not only is there no information about who makes decisions in asylum cases and how, but they are also kept in the dark about the progress of their case. This breeds a constant mistrust towards Italian authorities and people. One cultural mediator said of

migrants in Sicily, “People are frustrated with Italy.” Over time, this absence of trust heavily undermines the extent to which migrants believe any other information provided to them.

### Information in their own language

Many migrants who can understand and communicate in basic French or English cannot adequately process the often dense legal language in much of the distributed information materials. Information provided face-to-face or in written form are limited to a number of main language groups: Tigrinya, Arabic, French, English, and Italian. However there is a need for language support for dialects (from countries like Togo and Benin), and languages such as Bengali. The main problem lies in the fact that people that speak the language of the migrants are often not permanently present in the camps, so they are not available to answer to questions that may arise or to correct misunderstanding.



## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

**“Not everyone has a smartphone, but in groups there is always at least one.”**

- Humanitarian Worker, C.A.R.A di Mineo



### Word of mouth

Migrants seek information and trust people from their informal networks, notably members of their communities who have already made the journey and are in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. According to those interviewed, migrants are much more likely to act upon information exchanged via word of mouth through their networks than through formal channels or authorities. This makes the process of correcting expectations or assumptions almost impossible for humanitarian organizations that primarily use formal systems of information dissemination. Word of mouth seems to be the main source of information for migrants from the time they leave their countries to when they arrive in Italy, and as they weigh decisions about onward movement towards the borders to go elsewhere in the EU zone.

### Facebook

Facebook is a ubiquitous presence as soon as migrants are able to use a smartphone or a computer. One of the first things many people do once they arrive safely in Italy is try to log in to their Facebook account, which most migrants had not been able to access for the entirety of their journey, to let loved ones know they are alive. On Facebook they are able to get updates on what has been going on in their own country, leave messages to all of their families and friends, and get in contact with relatives or friends in other parts of Europe.

### Smartphone messaging apps

Most migrants use the WhatsApp messaging application if they have access to a smartphone. Younger migrants also use Viber to make voice calls. Both systems allow them to record audio messages rather than writing and reading, which makes it easier especially for people with a lower level of literacy. Because migrants in Italy are provided with International calling cards, they use them as a currency to “buy” goods like SIM cards and/or data plans in the camps. The amount of money inside an International card for example will allow for an international call of 10 minutes, while with the same money you can buy, for example, a data plan for one month if you have an Italian SIM card, which it can then be used to call using Viber, Skype or similar smartphone applications.

### Mobile

Mobile phones remain one of the most important possessions for people on the move. For migrants, it is always a priority to have access to a phone to connect with informal networks or loved ones. All migrants interviewed explained that one of their first purchases in Italy has been a phone, and that a phone is one of their most valuable assets.

### Satellite TV

In the CARA visited, where migrants have been staying for several months, the majority of households have a satellite TV, which migrants use to watch news from their own countries, as well as football matches. As no Italian media have programs in any of their languages, the ability to see the news, sports or any other entertainment programs in their own language is a strong mitigating



# 03

## KEY FINDINGS.

### MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

**“For every 1000 migrants that make it here, another 5000 die in Libya”**

- Male migrant, Lampedusa Hotspot

**The predominant role of social media.** Social media and messaging applications are the most prominent means of communication, according to interviewees. Facebook and WhatsApp were consistently cited by migrants as being their main mode of interaction with family, friends, and networks in Europe and their home countries. One coordinator of an informal site in Rome said, “At least 80 percent have cell phones – and I think it’s something absolutely comprehensible, for them it’s like a life insurance, the only way that they can keep in touch with their parents and at home and abroad. Maybe they don’t have shoes or a jacket, but they have a cell phone.”

**A distorted narrative of the journey to Italy.** Despite the fact that many migrants’ families are forced to pay ransom in Libya, very often the extent of the hardships that migrants endure in captivity in Libya before they board boats bound for Italian coasts is not communicated back home and therefore does not allow others considering a similar journey to make an informed decision. The shame associated with some of the experiences endured by migrants during their trip pushes many to portray a very different image of the situation in Europe, and what they have gained by leaving their countries. On social media for example, this translates into describing their lives in Europe and their trip as being much less dangerous, distressing and traumatic than the reality.

**Traffickers dominate the migration (mis)information landscape.** Most of the migrants interviewed left their countries of origin without an express route or destination plan in mind. In absence of careful or informed formal planning, migrants rely heavily on social media and word of mouth along the way, even as the international policy dynamics that govern their destinies are constantly changing. This makes them highly vulnerable to misinformation and rumor, and thus they can quickly fall victim to smuggler networks operating out of common

transit points in strategic areas near countries of origin on the African continent. These traffickers have extensive coordinated regional information networks that frequently include corrupt officials. A powerful tactic is to deprive their “paying clients,” or coerced victims, of access to outside sources of information, and ply them instead with false information and false hope.

**Information access varies with nationality.** Overall, the information needs of migrants and refugees who arrive in Italy vary based on country of origin. Humanitarian staff say that Syrian migrants and Sudanese migrants (a minority of those arriving in Italy) are very well informed about international protection, legal procedures and processes. Eritreans were also highlighted as being better informed than most migrants, as they have well-established networks throughout Europe, and historically have a high rate of being granted international protection in Italy due to the political situation in Eritrea. Eritreans are also one of the few nationalities eligible for the EU relocation scheme (along with Syrians and Yemenis, among seven other nationalities<sup>7</sup>), the criteria for which is subject to change every quarter.<sup>8</sup> Sub-Saharan African migrants were found to have less access to information along the routes, and tend to be less informed about international protection and other legal procedures once in Italy. Less information is available in relevant sub-Saharan languages and/or persons of sub-Saharan nationality do not read or write French or English adequately to be able to understand the complex legal information conveyed through written materials.

**Information darkness and abuses in Libya.** As noted above, the vast majority of those interviewed testified to having had their means of communication taken from them along the journey. The impact of this is most shockingly demonstrated in migrants’ stories about their transit through Libya. A striking majority of the migrants interviewed reported being tortured, held in captivity, or sexually abused in Libya. Some migrants also said that they were afraid to access connectivity points, such as internet cafés, knowing that they would be violently punished if they were seen doing so.

## MINORS

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the vulnerable situation of this group, and the limited scope of this assessment, Internews did not directly interview minors during the course of the assessment. The following information was provided by humanitarian organizations working with minors.

**Relying on informal networks.** According to humanitarian agencies working with minor migrants (both accompanied and unaccompanied), the primary source of information for minor migrants is the informal networks they create with other people who reach Italy, with social media (Facebook) and messaging applications (WhatsApp, Viber) being the means of communication with these networks.

**Minors are not informed about their rights.** According to a recent research done by REACH for UNICEF, “All children interviewed (in Italy) expected to be sent back to Ventimiglia or arrested if they encountered the police at the border. Although many children claimed to have family members in France, none of them were aware of their right to contact relatives and apply for asylum accordingly. Indeed, children were not aware that reported push backs were illegal and could be challenged through law. As the paper that children received at the border by police was not translated in a language they understood, they further did not have access to information that would allow them to claim their rights. Children’s insufficient knowledge about their rights and relevant procedures made them try to avoid the police at all costs, often taking risks and putting themselves in dangerous situations. As a result, children were aware neither of the violations of their rights, nor of the means to challenge the practice of push backs. Instead, children resorted to taking less safe routes, such as walking through mountains or paid smugglers in order to minimize the risk of being caught by the police.”

<sup>7</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-15-5698\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5698_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup> The changing criteria for the EU relocation scheme is an example of a legal procedure that creates a risk of the spread of misinformation, as eligible nationalities are reevaluated every quarter. It shows once more the need for a dynamic information strategy that can incorporate the latest changes in policies and procedures.

## GOVERNMENT

**“We do what we can, but the fact that other EU countries are not applying the rules in the same ways is putting us in an uncomfortable position”**

- Official at the Ministry of Interior

**Information as an unregulated mandate.** Italian law mandates that information be provided to all persons entering the country with the intent to seek asylum. The law states that whenever a foreign or stateless person enters Italian territory and expresses intent to apply for international protection, “The competent authorities have the duty to provide information about how to access the procedure and to ensure an adequate interpretation service in order to facilitate access to the asylum procedure.”<sup>9</sup> However, this law leaves much to interpretation, and there is a notable lack of uniformity in enforcing regulations regarding information provision in formal reception centers. Without clear guidelines regarding standards, those responsible for implementing this mandate cannot be held accountable.

**No central repository of information for migrants and refugees.** While the Italian government is consistently investing in the migrant response effort, there seems to be a lack of capacity and funding to cover all the aspects of the response. Information provision is the first casualty of this system, where there is no official website or repository of migrant/refugee laws, regulations or contact information for people or organizations to reach in migrants’ languages. Nor is there a complete official mapping of all services available to migrants across the country.

## HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

**“We try as much as possible to provide the right information, but.... sometimes you have 1000 people disembarking and all you can do is to give them a flier and hope they know how to read”**

- Official at the Ministry of Interior

**Quantity versus quality of information.** The information pamphlets provided to migrants both upon disembarkation and at CARAs do indeed address migrants’ legal status, and outline principles of international protection. However, the way in which much of the information is presented makes it difficult for migrants to fully absorb. There are no multimedia versions of information conveyed in official pamphlets, which means limited options for those who do not read, or who do not adequately understand the languages in which the material is made available (commonly Tigrinya, Arabic, French, and English).

**Lack of two-way communication mechanisms and expertise.** Information provision is overwhelmingly one-way and top-down. There is little opportunity for Q&A and two-way communication as the legal associates and cultural mediators who can answer questions about legal status are often not permanently based in the camps, and visit only intermittently (in some cases only two people are available for a population of more than 500 migrants in one day). There is an acute lack of specialized communications/CwC staff capable of assessing information needs, identifying appropriate channels, developing two-way communication strategies, setting up feedback mechanisms, or establishing more engagement-focused information provision interventions in line with international best practice in the CwC field.

**No CwC coordination.** Related to the above, there are no coordination structures within the humanitarian system that address common approaches to information or engagement with the affected population. Coordination between humanitarian actors providing information occurs on an ad-hoc basis and mostly on an informal level. This is compounded by the fact that much of the capacity dedicated to information provision operates on a roving basis, making the prospect of more formal CwC coordination even more difficult.

**Competing narratives, misinformation, and the trust deficit.** As referenced above, many migrants arrive in Italy with misconceptions about the national asylum system based on information shared by social media, word of mouth, “facilitators,” and traffickers – all fueled by the tyranny of hope. It is clear from the interviews conducted that the provision of limited “one-way” information does little to disabuse refugees of many of the mistaken preconceptions that have sustained them through their journeys. This situation is aggravated by the lack of trust in official sources that has already been referenced. For example: migrants interviewed immediately following a UNHCR information briefing still retained their preconceived notions about who is eligible for international protection and the various legal procedures, despite having been presented with accurate information by UNHCR staff.



## MEDIA

**“You see, the migrants get to travel for free in Italy, while Italians pay for them.”**

- Italian Woman, Agrigento



The time, location and resource constraints of this assessment made it difficult for Internews to meet with individual media outlets face to face. As Italy continues to slip several places in the world rankings for freedom of press every year – in 2016, according to a report<sup>10</sup> by Reporters Without Borders, Italy slid from 73rd place to the 77th – more needs to be done to reinforce the delivery of unbiased information about migrants in the country. The following observations are drawn from a desk review of the media products available for migrants and refugees in Italy:

**Migration issue as a political tool.** Generally speaking, the issue of migration features daily in Italian broadcast media. Reporting is heavily focused on crimes committed by migrants and refugees, and on the high number of arrivals in Sicily; with comparatively little coverage of issues such as the right to asylum; the difference between refugees and migrants; and the actual services offered and provided by the Italian Government to migrants arriving in Italy. The political discourse over migration is a hot topic around which media reporting divides sharply along left/right political lines. This kind of coverage plays to the emotions and partisan political sensibilities of Italian audiences rather than providing balanced public interest information, thus stoking rumors and stereotyping that result in prejudice and hostility towards migrants. For example, almost none of the Italians interviewed during the assessment were aware that of the 35 euros that the government allocates to each migrant, only 2.5 euros per day is actually given to them, while the rest is given to the Italian organizations managing the sites.

**Lack of local media programs that are useful to migrants.** Local media is geared to serve local Italian audiences and therefore lacks incentive or capacity to source, produce, and disseminate information for refugees. While there are a number of Italian language programs about migrants and refugees on local radios stations, and one on the main state owned radio (Radio Rai 1), there is an almost complete lack of broadcast content designed to offer refugees local, practical, accurate, up-to-date information in their own languages about rights, entitlements, changes in policies, eligibility criteria and available services.

**Information sources dedicated to refugees are not trusted.** Despite various efforts outside of local media to provide refugees with information, websites like <http://fr.infomigrants.net/> were completely unknown by

the migrants interviewed, and all the migrants interviewed expressed almost no interest in accessing “outside” media to source information. Even after being shown the website, most of them questioned the sources of the information. As previously noted, various factors have contributed to a general lack of trust in any information provided by people outside migrants’ own communities. The absence of a credible, consistent and interactive information service results in the perpetuation of rumors and misinformation amongst different ethnic groups.

A 100-page report, *Moving Stories*, has been released just ahead of the United Nations-sponsored International Migrants Day on Friday 18 December, 2016. The report reviews media coverage of migration in the European Union and in 14 countries across the world. Among the topics it highlights (all of which apply to Italy as well) are:

- **Missed opportunities:** European media outlets failed to raise the alarm about an imminent influx of refugees fleeing war in Syria and Iraq, even though the story was there to be told a year before the crisis broke in 2015.
- **Hate speech:** Malevolent anti-migrant or anti-Muslim statements by high profile politicians in Europe and the US have fuelled increasing public concern and hijacked media coverage.
- **Questionable journalistic standards:** Media failure to provide detailed and reliable information about the refugee crisis because of stretched editorial resources or due to the lack of presence of well-informed journalists able to provide in-depth and sensitive reporting;
- **Sensationalism:** The extent to which journalism is driven by hyperbole, intolerance and distortion with confusion over and misuse of the terminology used in referring to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers.

**Source:**

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/dec/17/where-media-fails-on-the-reporting-of-migrants-and-refugees>

<sup>10</sup> See here: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2016>

# 04

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**“They come to me to ask me information about their asylum request, and there is no way I can convince them that I have nothing to do with their legal status”**

- Director of the reception center,  
Private Entity, Sicily

”

## FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

**Launch a regional collective service for communication and community engagement<sup>11</sup>.** Just as the European migration crisis is not a single-country policy or security issue, a strategy for CwC should not consider Italy to be a standalone context. A regional approach to information coordination should be adopted that prioritizes two-way communication, where communities receive timely, coherent and useful information via preferred communication channels and are also enabled to provide feedback or complaints. Internews strongly recommends that all humanitarian organizations involved in the response across Europe, (including government entities), build upon already-existing mechanisms, use a diversity of channels (radio, SMS, phone, community-based networks, etc.) to deliver information. Migrant communities need to be involved in the set-up of the system, and planning needs to include a thorough understanding of the social, cultural and behavioral practices of migrant communities. The regional service could embed all or part of the activities listed below.

<sup>11</sup> Based on a common Concept Note & Work plan developed by UNICEF, Internews, UNHCR, UNOCHA, CDAC, IFRC, ICRC and other agencies, a collective service for communication and community engagement consists of two-way communication, where communities engage throughout the response, receive timely, coherent and useful information via preferred communication channels and through which affected people provide feedback or complaints. This will ultimately help communities to become more knowledgeable, skilled and connected and to bring about the social changes needed to address risks and underlying vulnerabilities. Examples of common services can be found for example in Iraq and Nepal.

### **Create a single platform for migrant information.**

Internews recommends the establishment of a unique platform for the provision of information regarding legal procedures, humanitarian services, and other relevant information for migrants in Italy. This should be achieved by working with all relevant stakeholders to maintain an up-to-date resource for both migrants and those who work on the migration response on issues including, but not limited to, legal procedures and access to services. This platform can be created only if there is dedicated capacity to respond to questions and feedback, and would only be used if groundwork is done to gain trust from migrant communities. For example, audio and video content are desperately needed to address the information needs of migrants who cannot read, or for whom there is no information available in their dialect. To do this, Internews strongly recommends hiring migrants from different countries of origin to participate in the operation of the platform, which needs to be in translated in different languages.

### **Carry out service-mapping as a basis for essential information sets.**

Internews recommends coordination with Italian authorities and civil society to engage in formal service-mapping, to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of which entity is doing what and where, so that migrants have access to all possible opportunities to seek assistance. This mapping should be available online, and possibly also as an audio system, or as part of a phone help-desk mechanism. This should be done not only for services in Italy, as there is clearly an acute need for information about protection and other services along the entire route. Cooperation is needed between local authorities, NGOs, and civil society organizations in order to map services and make information available in multiple languages, media (audio, video, print) and across those digital, mobile and social media platforms that are already much used by migrants during their journey.

### **Set up feedback and rumor tracking mechanisms nationally and in all centers.**

Internews recommends the establishment of sustained feedback collection systems that directly address the issue of rumors and misinformation. Extensive daily face-to-face information gathering will allow for the identification of prevailing misinformation, misunderstandings and rumors amongst migrant groups. These need to be addressed in a timely and consistent way with accurate and transparently-sourced information, provided in appropriate languages. Migrants themselves may be trained to participate in these efforts, especially in long-term centers.

**Create a matrix of responsibilities (who does what, when and where).** Internews recommends that NGOs operating in CARA facilities coordinate with the managing entity to communicate to migrants a basic matrix of

responsibilities, so that they understand who is operating in the center, what their role is, and which organization they can approach for specific needs. This will also allow migrants to understand where they can get information about their pending process and who to talk to ask for relevant information. The matrix should also be used to inform the migrants about the different steps of the process “behind the scenes” so that they understand which decisions are made by whom, and how those decisions are made.

### **Establish a national and local Communication with Communities (CwC) working group.**

Internews strongly recommends the establishment of one national (and several local) Communication with Communities (CwC) working groups, in order to coordinate content and provision of information, community engagement activities, share ideas, best practices, trends, and feedback mechanisms. This group may be informed by lessons learned from the CDAC network, and from the model used in Greece, to make sure that information is coordinated, engaging, targeted and useful across the entire response. This Working Group should eventually sit, at the national level, under the Tavolo di Coordinamento Nazionale.

### **Increase CwC fixed capacity in sites and nationally.**

Roving information/communication personnel are not conducive to establishing trust among affected populations. In addition to this, communication with affected communities should be done by experts, and not simply relegated to legal advisors and facilitators. Standing CwC expertise should be available in each organization to work with the legal experts and the facilitators, so that the information is provided in a two-way, engaging, targeted and coordinated manner. Opportunities for face-to-face information provision – especially regarding legal procedures – should be regularly available in reception facilities.

### **Create help-desks and mobile access across borders.**

Once migrants are in the hands of smugglers, they are particularly vulnerable, as they have limited or no means to access information about their journey or how to get assistance. Internews recommends one centralized help-desk be set up, with adequate numbers of relevant language-speaking staff, that can be reached by migrants via telephone, messaging services, and social media across several countries. The data collected from such a service can be hugely helpful to humanitarian actors and authorities in providing them with a better understanding of the situation and needs of affected populations on the move.



**Provide connectivity and mobile charging stations.**

The three five-euro phone cards provided to migrants to call their loved ones when they arrive safely to Italy are an inadequate response to their communication needs. Humanitarians, local authorities, private companies (possibly with engagement from Telecommunication Agencies) should make every effort to provide free WiFi at all hotspots, as well as make access available for all to means of connectivity including mobile phones and computer. While some organizations have already created mobile charging stations and mobile information points, this system needs to be expanded to set up charging stations and WiFi hotspots in places where migrants congregate (like train stations), with a particular focus on urban areas and border towns like Ventimiglia.

**Provide resources for life-saving information in the country of origin.**

Some migrants do not have pre-determined plans to migrate, and are preyed upon on by smugglers at common junctures and crossing points. Internews recommends that local authorities and humanitarian organizations work together along the routes of migration to provide persons in at-risk origin countries with information about protection and assistance available in their countries, so they do not feel that being trafficked is the only option available to them, especially if they face danger or any specific hardship in their own country.

## FOR THE MEDIA

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**“I did not know where I was going when I left my country, I just knew I had to run away. I had no plan, the only plan was survival”**

- Nigerian Migrant, CARA di Mineo, Catania ————”

**Set up web radios.** Italian radio stations are naturally geared to deliver Italian content for Italian audiences, not multiple language content for migrants and refugees. Web radios like Radio Asante are a perfect way to address this issue, being able to deliver appropriate content in a variety of languages. Several important considerations in making these initiatives effective are A) Their capacity to source the right kind of information from the appropriate sources (humanitarian agencies, various authorities, legal sources, etc.) B) Their journalistic and ethical capacity to present the information in ways that are timely, accurate, balanced and engaging and C) Their ability to promote their services i.e. to let migrants know they exist and how to access them – this requires active collaboration between web radios and other actors (NGOs and civil society groups) who have daily access to migrant populations.

**Reinforce professional and unbiased reporting about migration issues to Italian audiences.**

Substantial work still needs to be done by Italian media and/or training organizations to enable consistent, informative and balanced reporting on migrant issues. Internews recommends the following interventions:

**Provide financial and technical support to a selected number of local, independent, and moderate media organizations.**

There are very few independent, moderate local voices in Italy and those are struggling to stay afloat due to limited resources and support. A range of options exists for supporting and strengthening these outlets: training for journalists on “humanitarian reporting,” interview techniques that deal with trauma, migrant rights, terminology, legal issues etc., familiarization with the landscape of humanitarian response, services and actors, small grant support to incentivize and enable special reporting strands.

**Organize Roundtables and Town Hall events between CSOs, government officials, humanitarian organizations and local media.**

Bringing together local activists, civil society, aid organizations and local media, round tables create an open space for discussion of humanitarian, social, cultural, economic and other pressing issues around migration issues.

**Bring stories of the journey to countries of origin.**

Many migrants testified that if they had known the full extent of the hardships they would face on their journey from their home countries to Europe (especially their experiences in Libya) they likely would have made different decisions. Internews recommends working with local media in countries of origin to share stories from migrants in Europe that shed light on the role of human traffickers in the migration economy, the brutality faced by many while held in Libya, and other elements of the journey. Mechanisms for collaboration between media and civil society groups and other actors are needed in order to create and share stories between Italy and countries of origin. Interlocutors/journalists/interviewers need training to interview migrants and produce stories that offer prospective migrants frank and detailed accounts of the brutal realities of the journey.

**Debunk myths about Europe in countries of origin.**

Related to the above, local media, humanitarian organizations, civil society, and other actors working in host countries have the potential to influence decisions made by local authorities in the country of origin of migrants. Internews recommends that local media and humanitarian organizations working on migration issues strive to facilitate frank dialogue in the country of origin about the political realities of migration in Europe; how the asylum system works and how long the various processes take; international protection, and who it is meant for.

## FOR THE ITALIAN AUTHORITIES

**“I would like to know what information I should provide to support my claim for asylum.”**

- Male Gambian migrant, Villa Sikania

**Establish common standards for information provision.** Information provided during reception should be focused on practical issues not only related to services and legal procedures, but also to integration and social rights within Italy. Despite the fact that information provision for migrants is mandatory under Italian law, there is no standardized system of evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the information provided. Due to the multiple points of entry for migrants into Italy, as well as a large and complex reception system that encompasses many actors (Italian authorities, NGOs, private companies), the quality of the information provided varies significantly from site to site. Internews notes that communication experts in the humanitarian field need coordination and assistance to draft standards that can be implemented in different reception sites, in order to bolster accountability in information services.

**Establish clear accountability mechanisms for the private organizations managing the camps.** Internews recommends the set-up of accountability mechanisms in all reception centers so migrants are able to lodge complaints and voice concerns without fear of recourse. Internews recommends coordination between sectors within the Italian migration response in order to mainstream the collection and analysis of feedback from migrants (see common feedback mechanism above). Feedback is a vital tool for tracking the evolving needs of migrants for humanitarian/legal services and for information. It enables service providers to identify gaps in the response and to adapt their programs to meet changing needs. In reception centers, Internews recommends that the Italian government takes steps to ensure that humanitarian organizations, managing entities (private companies who run the CARA facilities) and local authorities set up formal and informal complaint mechanisms, so that migrants are able to voice concerns, raise protection issues and give other feedback in a safe and confidential manner.

## FOR THE EU

**“We survived the journey through Libya. Whatever comes next is like nothing.”**

- Eritrean male migrant, informal center Rome

**Provide information about rights when migrants are detained/returned.** When migrants attempt to cross one of Italy’s borders and are intercepted by police, they should be informed of their legal rights in a language they can adequately understand. Migrants detained for the purpose of return to Italy should be given access to communication, to contact a loved one or a legal professional. By no means should they have their phones or any other means of communication confiscated or interfered with.

**Establish and demand clarity about the application and implementation of Dublin agreements.** Rumors about enforcement of Dublin regulations are some of the most frequently circulated amongst migrants and those who work with them. Internews recommends the EU draft a strategy for the consistent communication of information about the Dublin agreements to all stakeholders. Border countries with Italy, like France and Switzerland, need to openly explain how they are implementing the Dublin agreement, and to be very clear with migrants about what rights they have or do not have when they cross their borders.

## SABOTAGING COMMUNICATION AT FRENCH BORDER

There were several accounts of detention and forced returns of migrants from France, following attempts to cross the border illegally. One humanitarian staff member relayed anecdotes told by returned migrants, in which French police confiscated migrants’ cellphones following their apprehension at the border, and purposefully entered erroneous PIN codes, so that their cellphones would be blocked. No matter the circumstance or a person’s legal status, access to information and connectivity should be considered as a humanitarian protection issue. Withholding information or interference with a migrant’s means of connectivity can make them even more vulnerable, especially those who are outside any formal reception system.

# ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT

From 3 April to 13 April 2017, an Internews assessment team carried out a rapid Information Needs Assessment with migrants and refugees in Italy to gauge the current information needs and access of migrants and refugees, and to learn about the current situation of the Communication with Communities (CwC) response across the country. The assessment included more than 60 interviews with migrants and refugees, representatives from local volunteer groups, civil society organizations, and national and international humanitarian organizations in five different locations in Italy; namely, Catania, Agrigento, Lampedusa, Rome and Ventimiglia. The assessment also surveyed migrants access to information during the trip from their countries of origin. There were limitations to the team's ability to consult with local media inside the country due mainly to time constraints, but several phone interviews were conducted with local journalists and humanitarian organizations prior to the visit. The CDAC Network Common Needs Assessment Tools<sup>12</sup> were used as reference to guide key informant interviews.

## ABOUT INTERNEWS

Internews ([www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org)) is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard. Internews has been working on the refugees and migrants crisis in Greece since 2015. Through trainings, products and technical assistance, Internews helps a wide array of local partners and International organizations to embed CwC into program design and implementation. These initiatives include tracking rumours and answering them for migrants and refugees; collecting feedback from beneficiaries and deliver them back to humanitarian organizations; working with local media outlets, helping traditional media increase their programs aiming at a peaceful coexistence with the host communities; deliver daily legal and other types of information to refugees and migrants via social media and its online website "News that Moves."

## COMMUNICATION IS AID

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, keeping communities informed about what's happening around them, how to reconnect with their families and friends or what aid services may be available for them, goes beyond saving lives. It is about restoring people's dignity and respect, it is about fulfilling people's rights and the right to know, ask questions and participate in their own relief and recovery and, very importantly, holding stakeholders to account. Communicating with Communities (CwC) is an emerging field of humanitarian response that helps to meet the information and communications needs of people affected by crisis. CwC is based on the principle that information and communications are critical forms of aid in their own right, without which disaster survivors cannot access services or make the best decisions for themselves and their communities. Since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Internews has been present in major humanitarian crises around the world, establishing critical links between affected populations, local media, and humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving information and set up effective two-way communication platforms between local communities and aid providers. Internews is pre-qualified to UK DFID's Rapid Response Facility (RRF) and it is also the co-founder of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network ([www.cdacnetwork.org](http://www.cdacnetwork.org)) in London.

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12 <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20140721171402-wj4au>



The CDAC Network is a cross-sector initiative between aid agencies, UN organizations, The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, media development organizations and technology providers that recognizes information and two-way communication as key humanitarian deliverables. The CDAC Haiti initiative led by Internews in the immediate aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake on behalf of the CDAC Network as mandated by OCHA “achieved one of the largest cross-agency commitments to communications ever seen in an emergency, playing a particularly important leadership role in coordinating communications around the cholera epidemic. It succeeded in providing critical services, coordination, strategic leadership, capacity building and advocacy for better communication with affected people. While a favorable context and propitious circumstances played a critical part, hard work and skillful decisions, along with OCHA’s ongoing support, also contributed to CDAC Haiti success... CDAC Haiti played a key role in facilitating partnerships and building relationships. Its operational model filled a gap in a way much appreciated by partners.”

**Internews approach to CwC is based on a strategy that takes into account the following components:**



**Information Ecosystems Assessments** - Internews situation assessments begin by analyzing how people affected by crisis find, share and use information, so that our projects can identify the appropriate and trusted channels to reach people in their own languages.



**Local Partnerships** - Internews provides training, mentoring, small grants and technical support to local media and civil society partners in crisis situations, thus supporting their role as trusted information sources that connect with the local communities in their own languages.



**Two-way Communication** - Internews uses a range of techniques to create two-way communication feedback loops between people affected by crisis, local media and humanitarian responders. Our projects not only create opportunities for communities to ask questions and air concerns about the aid effort, but also respond directly to those information needs, channel community voices to those who are in a position to respond to their needs, and involve local media as trusted intermediaries in the ongoing conversation.



**Rumor Tracking** - Internews collects feedback in communities in order to identify rumors and misinformation, debunk them and provide people with accurate information that can help them make informed decisions in times of crisis.



**Appropriate Technologies** - Internews makes careful decisions regarding the use of technology that is available, appropriate to the situation and accessible/familiar to the people we need to reach.



**Policy and Advocacy** - As the co-founder of the Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities (CDAC) Network, Internews advocates to donors, institutions and policy makers for information and communication strategies that contribute to more effective humanitarian response.



**Empowering Local Media** - Internews offers training and technical support, equipment and small grants to local media in crisis situations. Internews assistance shores up the lifeline role that local media play in providing communities with timely, accurate, actionable information from trusted sources in relevant languages. Effective local media can enable informed decision making, mitigate conflict and promote community resilience in times of crisis.

# ANNEXES

## LIMITATIONS

- The team was not able to consult communities inside all of the camps and centers across Italy. Therefore one camp per type was chosen for the assessment.
- As much as the team tried to ensure people with disabilities and the elderly were represented; the team did not conduct specific interviews exclusively for these populations.
- In line with Global Child Protection Working Group guidance and given the consultation took place sometimes within days of their arrival in Italy, children were not interviewed because of the potential harm (including re-victimization) such interviews may have caused.
- This consultation focused on information needs and access by affected populations. While Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) were considered, the primary framework was Communicating with Communities (CwC) with a focus on two-way communication.
- The team encountered particular challenges in seeking to interview migrants that have decided autonomously to leave the official centers and try to cross the borders because of the “illegal” nature of their status in Italy. Few were willing to talk about their plans or reveal their sources/patterns of information sharing.
- Internews was granted permission from the Ministry of Interior for interviews but other local/national authorities were not willing to be interviewed.

## LOCATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

The Internews assessment team would like to thank all the individuals and organizations that generously supported the mission and the production of this report with their time, views and advice. Special thanks go to: UNHCR Italy, Caritas, the Italian Red Cross, MSF Italy, Baobab, Intersos, We World, Save the Children, the Italian Ministry of Information, Consorzio Calatino Terra d’Accoglienza, Associazione Culturale Cometa. A special acknowledgement to the staff working in the camps and locations visited, and in particular: Lampedusa Hotspot, Villa Sikania, Cara di Mineo, the Saint Antonio church in Ventimiglia, plus the “A28 Center” and the Baobab informal center in Rome. Last but not least, a very special thanks to all the migrants and refugees that despite their frustration, fatigue and traumatic experiences, accepted to talk and share their personal stories with us. We hope this report will somehow contribute to making their lives better in the future, and we wish them all the best of luck in their journey for a free and dignified life in Europe.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anahi Ayala Iacucci leads the Internews Humanitarian team as the Senior Director for Humanitarian Programs. Anahi plays a key role in developing Internews' global Humanitarian program strategies; while also closely supporting teams in the field and managing Internews Emergency Response Program. With over a decade of experience in the field of ICT4D and Humanitarian Technology, Anahi has worked in more than 16 countries around the world and in most of the major humanitarian emergencies of the last 10 years. Anahi holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Bologna; a Master Degree in International Affairs from Colombia University; and a Master in Human Rights from the University of Padova.

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## PHOTOS

Cover photo: Roman Bodnarchuk/Adobe Stock

Photo Page 3: Wead / Shutterstock.com  
More than 1000 migrants arriving at the port of Catania after being rescued by British warship HMS Bulwark (Catania, June 2015)

Photo Page 6: Marco Aprile / Shutterstock.com  
A group of migrants seeking to reach northern Europe stuck in Como after Switzerland closed its borders (Como, August 2016)

Photo Page 8: Angelo Giampiccolo / Shutterstock.com  
African immigrants sleeping on a concrete block in the port, while their clothes are drying under the sun (Scoglitti, Ragusa Province, March 2011)

Photo Page 10: Anahi Ayala Iacucci/Internews.  
Flyers distributed to migrants at the arrival points and developed by IOM and UNHCR, containing legal information about the asylum process.)

Photo Page 12: MikeDotta / Shutterstock.com  
Red Cross reception center is temporary hub for refugees arriving in Italy (Settimo Torinese, July 2015)

Photo Page 16: fabiodevilla / Shutterstock.com  
Refugees on arrival in a refugee camp emergency in Italy (Bolzano, September 2015)



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